

Jeopardy Assessment

*Proposed Incidental Take Permit: Dairyland N-5 Preconstruction Activities –
Vegetation Clearing Amendment (ITP 301)*

Species: Eastern Massasauga

Location: Buffalo County

Background

Project Information

Dairyland Power Cooperative (Dairyland) is planning for the construction of the Alma to Rock Elm (N-5) 69 kilovolt (kV) Transmission Line Project. The N-5 69 kV transmission line was built in 1948 and is in poor condition and nearing the end of its useful life. The estimated typical lifespan of a wood pole transmission line is 55 to 65 years, and the N-5 is nearly 70 years old. The work for which Dairyland is seeking permitting at this time is the preconstruction clearing of vegetation within the existing 80-foot right-of-way within eastern massasauga habitat. The vegetation clearing activities are planned to occur during frozen ground conditions in early 2019.

Species Information

Eastern massasaugas (*Sistrurus catenatus*) are a State Endangered Species and a Federally Threatened Species. This rattlesnake is strongly associated with floodplain habitats along medium to large rivers, especially near river confluences, where they primarily occupy open canopy wetlands, such as sedge meadows, fresh wet meadows, scrub carr and adjacent upland prairies, floodplain forests and old fields. Overwintering usually occurs in terrestrial crayfish burrows or rotted out root channels in open canopy wetlands, shrub-carr and lowland hardwood forests. Massasaugas begin to emerge in spring, usually in early April when soil temperatures average 50° F, at 15 cm depth, within overwintering habitats. They can remain active until mid-November, depending on air temperatures. This species breeds primarily in August and females give birth in late July or August the following year.

Conservation Measures

1. Completing upland work and upland access during the (eastern massasauga rattlesnake's) EMR's inactive season will avoid mortality of active snakes. Impacts to overwintering snakes in the wetlands could occur, however only approximately half of the project is located in wetlands. Because both uplands and wetlands will be impacted with this project, it was determined that winter work would have the least impact on the snake population.
2. The use of low ground pressure tracked vehicle (a tracked skid loader with a frontend mounted brush hog) to reduce ground compaction and the likelihood of burrow collapse.
3. The use of low ground pressure tracked vehicle in combination with completing the vegetation clearing activities at a time of year when ideal ground conditions exist (ground is snow covered and frozen) will minimize impacts. A Dairyland vegetation management crew would also use chain saws to remove any danger trees along the edge of the ROW that may grow into the wires. Any danger trees that are cut down will be left along the edge of the ROW to provide habitat for the EMR.

4. No specific mitigation measures for EMR are required because the Project will not result in any permanent loss of habitat for the species.
5. It is anticipated that the EMRs will be in hibernation at the time the work is completed and finding snakes on the surface is not expected. However, if an EMR is found, the snake will be left alone, work in the area will stop, and a Wildlife Rehabilitator permitted to work with massasauga rattlesnakes will be called to remove the snake <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/directory.html>. Stacy Rowe (stacy.rowe@wi.gov) will also be contacted.
6. All dead snakes found on site will be recorded (species, approximate age, possible cause of death), photographed, and reported to Stacy Rowe (stacy.rowe@wi.gov) at the conclusion of the Project.
7. Minor changes can be made to this Conservation Plan due to unforeseen circumstances if agreed upon in writing (e.g., email correspondence) by the applicant and WI DNR's Endangered Resources Utility Liaison (Stacy Rowe; stacy.rowe@wi.gov).

Jeopardy Assessment

The proposed activity will minimize and mitigate impacts to the eastern massasauga and as a result, we anticipate that take of this species will be low. The department has determined that the proposed activity is not likely to appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival or recovery of the eastern massasauga within the state, the whole plant-animal community of which it is a part or the habitat that is critical to its existence.